INDEXA

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Summer 2013 www.indexa.org Issue 102

A non-profit organization for the enhancement of amateur radio, worldwide peace, and friendship

Campbell Island—2012

By Gene Spinelli, K5GS

The team that brought you Campbell Island—ZL9HR

Mention the name Campbell Island to any 19 year old and you'll most likely get a blank look or, "Where is Campbell Island?" That was my reaction in June, 1965 when told I'd be going to Campbell Island, as well as circling the earth aboard a US Navy weather ship. We would leave Newport, Rhode Island in mid August and travel to Dunedin, New Zealand via the Panama Canal. After a 20 day Pacific Ocean crossing from Callao (Lima), Peru we would refuel and resupply in New Zealand and leave for the first of 5 month-long journeys to the Southern Ocean. Our destination was the weather "picket sea station" known as "60 South" located at 60 degrees south latitude and about 160 east longitude in support of the US Navy's Operation Deep Freeze. (The author has an informative website on Operation Deep Freeze that you might find interesting at www.aspen-ridge.net —Ed.)

On these journeys to "60 South" we would stop at Campbell Island to drop off mail and shuttle New Zealand personnel to the island, and then proceed to sea station. We'd return to Campbell Island several weeks later to collect outgoing mail and to ferry NZ personnel to Dunedin. During several of these stops I had the opportunity to go ashore on Campbell Island to meet the resident meteorological team and to view the wildlife. In January, 1966 we stopped at the Auckland Islands instead of Campbell Island in support of a scientific expedition.

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inside...

A small memento for Bill Jennings, W4UNP, for the exceptional job he fulfilled for INDEXA over the course of 30 years.

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Upon completing our weather assignments in the Southern Ocean, we would return to the USA the long way, via Australia, the Indian Ocean, Suez Canal and the Mediterranean to the North Atlantic, stopping in various countries along the way, and returning to Newport, Rhode Island in May of the following year. Returning to Newport I transferred to another ship and repeated the adventure for another Operation Deep Freeze season, completing my Navy enlistment with 2 circumnavigations of the world, visiting many countries and celebrating two Christmases and two birthdays below the Antarctic Circle, in the shadow of the Balleny Islands.

Now, let's fast forward 45 years to March, 2012 when I read an announcement in the DX bulletins about an upcoming Campbell Island DXpedition seeking people to join the team. I immediately sent an e-mail indicating my availability and was notified a few days later that I was on the team. When telling my wife what I'd done, she reminded me that I was no longer 19 years old!

The next months were consumed with preparing for the "adventure," as my wife came to describe the DXpedition. She and I already had a five week holiday scheduled in New Zealand that ended on Oct. 18, 2012. My original plan was to remain in NZ and meet the ZL9HR team in Invercargill on Nov. 22nd. My wife thought I'd wear out my welcome by staying with friends that long, so I flew home on Oct. 18th and then flew to Australia on Oct. 28th, where I stayed at a hotel and later with friends before returning to New Zealand on Nov 9th. I met John 9M6XRO in Dunedin on Nov. 22nd and we drove 3.5 hours south to Invercargill, NZ stopping to visit Cliff ZL4AS, and his lovely wife Isobel.

Campbell Island was last activated by a major DXpedition in January, 1999. ZL9CI spent twenty one days on the island, making a DXpedition record of 96,004 QSOs. Their landing permit prohibited overnight radio operation, so at sundown the team was required to return to their boat. Only under unsafe weather conditions could the team remain overnight. Our landing permit authorized ten operators on the island for ten days, with no overnight stays.

Our team began assembling in Invercargill on November 22nd and the first of several formal meetings with the New Zealand Department of Conservation (DoC) was conducted on November 24th. The island is a tightly controlled wildlife reserve, landing is not permitted without a permit, and they are extremely difficult to obtain, as well as being very expensive.

Team meeting with NZ Dept. of Conservation

Since 2001 the island's wildlife lives in a predator free environment after all the rats, mice and other predators were chemically removed from the island. Anything going to the island must be inspected for loose dirt, seeds, organic matter, insects, rats, mice, etc; all radio equipment, clothing, boots and even the boat must undergo detailed inspections by DoC personnel. Once equipment is inspected, everything goes into quarantine until the boat sails.

The ***INDEXA Newsletter*** is a quarterly publication of the International DX Association.

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DoC Quarantine Process.

Our equipment was unpacked by DoC personnel, inspected, and repacked in approved DoC provided containers and/or plastic coverings. Our boat the "Evohe" out of Dunedin is a DoC approved vessel. They use Evohe for their own visits to the island so we had a skipper and crew experienced with the Southern Ocean and the island.

After everything is inspected, it is repacked in sealed plastic bags where it remains until landfall on Campbell Island.

On November 26th we met in the DoC office for final inspections and the all-important briefings on safety and working around the island's wildlife. Then began the task of unloading the DoC Quarantine Store of all our equipment, loading the truck, and driving thirty minutes to Bluff, where the Evohe was waiting. With the help of the Evohe crew, several local hams, and our DoC partner, Gilly Adam, we loaded the boat in a few hours and prepared to get underway. Then skipper, Steve Kafka, gave us the bad news. The weather in the Southern Ocean was terrible; a 700 kilometer voyage through a storm with 50 knot winds and 10 meter seas would be too dangerous. If someone was seriously injured during the beating we would surely take from the boat's movements it would force us to cancel the DXpedition.

A decision was made to sail south, through the Foveaux Strait and anchor at Port Adventure, on the east coast of Stewart Island. Foveaux Strait is well known for its inhospitable waters; it lived up to its reputation! The seven hour journey was extremely rough, but nothing compared to what was to come. Because our gear was in "quarantine status" we were unable to go ashore on Stewart Island.

After over two days at anchor, the skipper plotted a course around the now waning storm; however the seas would still be in the four to five meter range. We were asked to remain in our bunk as much as possible to minimize the possibility of injuries, moving about the boat under these conditions required extreme caution. For the next two days we were knocked about, at times violently, as we headed directly into the wind and waves making an average 6 to 7 knots under sail and engines towards Campbell Island.

We arrived at Campbell Island early in the morning of Dec. 1, 2012, three days later than planned. There were a few minor injuries during the voyage, but fortunately nothing that would have jeopardized the DXpedition. That's easy for me to say, those who sustained the injuries were reminded of them every time they climbed in and out of the Zodiac, or lifted a piece of equipment.

Gilly Adam, the DoC officer, went ashore to open the buildings, and the Zodiac runs commenced. Equipment was staged on the wharf and carried about one hundred and fifty meters up a muddy hill, under the watchful eyes of the Hooker Sea Lions, to the operating buildings. The Evohe crew was instrumental in transferring the equipment and erecting antennas.

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Carting equipment to our shack. Uh, may we pass this way?

Jacky, ZL3CW, transporting the gear under the watchful eye of a local resident.

Each of us was loosely assigned a particular task, i.e., antennas, power distribution, coax, indoor set-up. By late afternoon we were on the air with the first contact made with ZL1BBO on 40 SSB, and the remaining equipment was installed the following day. Losing three days at sea required a rearrangement of the station/antenna plans. We were not able to install the 6 meter station, the 30 meter vertical, the 80 meter vertical, or the 40 meter Moxon beam.

Evohe skipper, Steve Kafka, helped with installing the Optibeam. Help from the Evohe crew was invaluable.

The organizers provided much of the equipment, which kept the project cost low. They had used the Kenwood transceivers, SPE amplifiers, and some of the antennas on previous DXpeditions. These four radios and four amps as well as two Elecraft stations provided by other team members, performed flawlessly. The Yamaha generators worked smoothly and flawlessly making the spare generators unneeded. The team had planned for every contingency, with redundancy for all mission critical systems, including more petrol than required.

We had the use of three rooms in the old Met Service building: a non functional kitchen in which the boat crew provided a propane gas fired hob for making hot tea and coffee; the former dining room, and the former recreation room. All windows were boarded over to prevent glass breakage from the winds; we were not permitted to remove the boards. The recreation room housed the SSB/RTTY team while CW was in the dining room. We did have a challenge with coax cables being strewn among the rooms; switching antennas between the radios became a frustrating task in the poorly lighted rooms.

At times, because of the terrain and the sea lions, changing an antenna's direction became a dangerous task, especially in the dark of night. Stepping on an unseen sea lion in a thick tussock could easily result in being bitten. We were advised by the DoC and the Evohe's skipper to exercise extreme cau-

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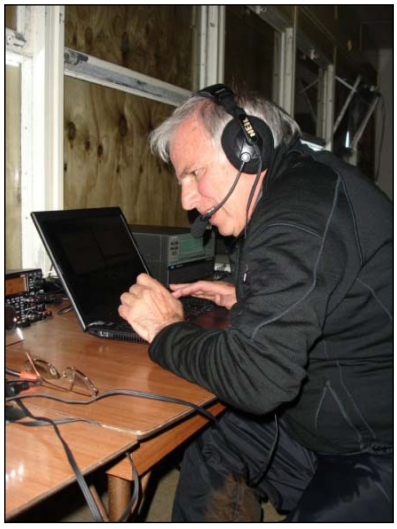
tion, especially at night or in the bush. Being bitten would most likely require an emergency evacuation. The sea lions were almost always aggressive yet not too threatening, but they constantly reminded you whose territory you were invading. We were cautioned to keep our distance and never touch or harass them. Also problematical were the mud-filled bogs that were visible along the walking track and also hidden in the tussocks. Finding yourself in one of these mud pits was a dangerous and unpleasant experience.



Left, your author, K5GS, listens carefully to pick out a SSB signal from the cacophony of callers that arose periodically.

Meanwhile, over in the CW shack Les Kalmus, W2LK, David Lloyd, K3EL, and Jacky Calvo, ZL3CW, try to keep up with a steady stream of CW callers.

One question we were asked was "Why don't you use vertical antennas in the water?" Our permit prohibited antennas in or near the water. There were no sandy beaches near our DoC designated operating sites and antennas were marked to minimize bird strikes. Another challenge was sea lions becoming entangled with radials and other cables.

The antennas proved to be efficient as installed, although we did have problems with the Spiderbeams. The new "preassembled" Spiderbeams were difficult and very time consuming to assemble. The documentation is poorly written, the antenna itself too cumbersome for use in a hostile environment and not robust enough to handle the winds. One Spiderbeam had to be assembled in an area with knee high grass; the wire elements and guys were easily tangled in the grass and were difficult to see.

The standard duty Spiderbeam on the upper hill (exposed to constant wind) was in shambles the next morning. We thought we may have assembled it incorrectly, so the team reassembled the antenna and it failed a second time within twenty four hours when an arm broke. It was replaced with a heavy duty Spiderbeam which worked well to the end of the operation. However, the aluminum hub frame of both Spiders was terribly deformed in the heavy winds. If you can bend a critical antenna part by hand, it's the wrong antenna for this application. And, while the positive aspect of the design was five bands on a single mast, the problem of antenna scheduling becomes evident with only two such antennas and no other tri-banders.

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Morning dawned with gray, windy skies and a badly beaten Spiderbeam. (See text.)

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The Steppir vertical failed towards the end of the DXpedition, leaving us with the 40 meter vertical (which performed perfectly) and a low mounted 80 meter dipole which performed well towards North America but not as well toward Europe or Asia. The homebrew monoband 10 and 15 meter Moxon antennas performed perfectly as did the 12/17 meter Optibeam.

For 160 we used an inverted L on an eighteen meter fiberglass push-up mast, a sight to be seen. The surprise challenge on 160 was man-made noise we suspected came from the NZ Met Service's automated weather station's inverters located in a building that was off limits to the team. In spite of the noise, John 9M6XRO and Dave K3EL made most of the 185 Qs on the few nights conditions cooperated. We made 43,000 Qs with 61.5% on CW vs. 35.6% on SSB and 2.9% on RTTY. Since there were neither daily team performance updates nor pilot reports we didn't know how we were doing from shift to shift. The SSB number was somewhat disappointing, but in retrospect we had some of the world's top CW ops and an insufficient number of "dedicated" SSB ops and only one RTTY capable station.

Several of the CW ops did double duty on RTTY and SSB as time allowed. However the use of Ham Radio Deluxe and a USB filter sub-optimized RTTY operations. We were asked to use this configuration rather than a superior N1MM MMTTY implementation that was available. We made some trade-offs between providing "All Time New Ones" (ATNO) to as many as possible or satisfying a band/mode fill request; we chose the ATNO as the goal because of the reduced number of operating days. Some callers expressed disappointment with this decision. In my opinion the ATNO always outranks a band/mode fill. I chose to stay on SSB where I could achieve higher rates than RTTY.

The weather on ZL9 was "changeable". (A severe understatement!) We experienced four seasons every day, including snow. The operating spaces were very cold at night. We had a few small LED light strips and flashlights to navigate the three rooms we were allowed to use. Being in dark rooms all the time, you tended to lose track of time.

Fortunately, after the first day an accommodation was made to permit half the team to remain on the island overnight and operate. Propagation in this part of the world was interesting; we lost about 6 hours a day due to lack of propagation. Although a band appeared dead, we'd call CQ in attempts to test the propagation. Dave K3EL prepared VOACAP predictions for all bands which provided insight into possible paths.

In recapping the pile-ups, signals tended to be loud on the bands I worked, the pile-ups energetic and sometimes challenging (unruly), with people calling over the station I was trying to work, others calling nonstop. When I heard a call or a partial I'd stay with it until logged, and I would not allow the pile-up to make the rules. For the most part, I listened only within the announced frequency spread to discourage "spread creep".

The Americas and JA pile-ups were relatively easy to control. As required, I gave "very" clear directions in an authoritative voice. Not unexpected, the EU pile-ups were a challenge and I lost my temper with them on the opening night when, they refused

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Dave, K3EL, whittles down the pileup with help from the spirit of INDEXA providing a presence "down under".

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to listen and/or stop calling.

Throughout the week I had outstanding NA, JA, and EU runs on 15, 17, and 40 meters. "Almost" everyone was disciplined and generally followed directions, although the weekends did highlight the problem. On my last midnight to 6AM shift running EU on 17 meters, the pile-up became unruly at about 3AM. Tired and sleep deprived, I asked Jacky, ZL3CW, to take over. He experienced the same chaos but being multi-lingual gave him an edge. I don't know what he said but things calmed down and I resumed operating after a 30 minute break until the band went out at about 5AM.

We've been dealing with poor pile-up behavior for a long time. Maybe the root cause is over enthusiastic weekend ops that won't have an opportunity to work the DX during the week, possibly inexperienced ops that have no mentor, maybe it's a language issue, or maybe they're simply rude people? Regardless of the cause, the DX op can only do so much when the pile-up doesn't follow directions! Going QRT is always an option, and I did that once when EU callers refused to follow directions.

There were 1,350 dupes, one EU op called on the same mode/band 3 times within an hour, I logged him again and again then moved on. Another EU op apologized for calling again; he said he wasn't sure if he was in the log—he was!

As I reflect on the adventure, it was a surreal feeling to again walk into a room on a remote sub-Antarctic island where I first walked 47 years before. Although in good repair, much of the building looked as if it were frozen in time with its old architecture, dated kitchen, antique wall mounted telephones and the "look and feel" of another era.

The 10 person team of: Jacky, ZL3CW, John, 9M6XRO, Pista, HA5AO, Don, VE7DS, Dave, K3EL, Glenn, KE4KY, Les, W2LK, John, VK3YP, Tommy, VK2IR and myself was augmented by the Evohe's crew and our DoC rep. They were there when we needed them; there was a lot of heavy lifting that would have been a real challenge without their help. They were genuinely interested in the specifics of DXing and the processes involved with setting up the stations. It would be nice if one or more of them applied for their ZL license as they go to the sub-Antarctic islands on a regular basis.

We certainly had our fair share of challenges during and after the DXpedition, but for the most part the experience and maturity of most of the team worked in our favor. Yet, we still have some challenges which are not resolved at this writing.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the NZ Department of Conservation and the NZ Met Service for their outstanding cooperation. No one lands on the island without approval from these agencies and they don't give approval easily.

And, of course, the friendships made on the team and in New Zealand will last a lifetime. Several of us will be attending Visalia 2013, while six of us will meet at Dayton 2013, and yet others will attend the International DX-Convention in Paestum, Italy, HamCom Texas and later we'll meet again in Friedrichshafen, Germany in June, 2013.

The DXpedition was a once in a lifetime adventure that required significant planning and work just to get to Campbell Island, and significant (physical) work while on the island. Working twenty four hours a day with short breaks for some sleep and a meal was extremely difficult, but the adrenaline was flowing and we had lots of fun regardless of the cold, rain and territorial sea lions. Speaking for myself, and I'm sure the other team members, we'd go back in an instant if the opportunity presents itself.

A big thank you goes out to all our sponsors for believing in us and lending their support.

—73 *Gene*, K5GS

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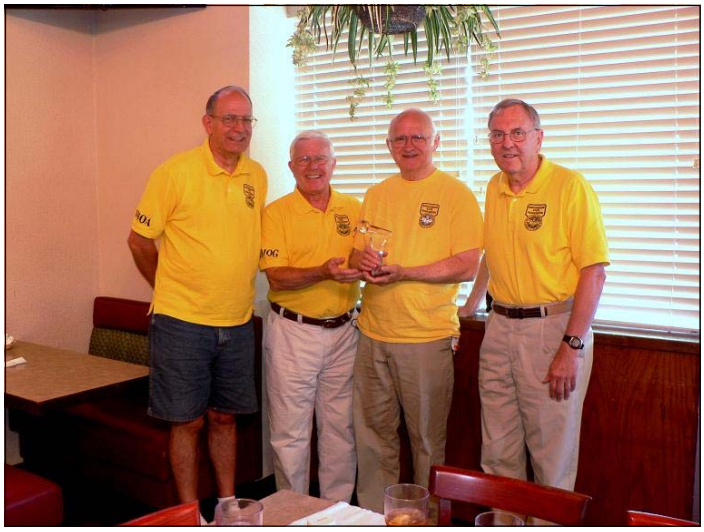
ZL9HR team members decompressing on dry, warm land for the victory dinner (and beers). L-R: Pista, HA5AO, Gene K5GS, Jacky ZL3CW, Les W2LK, Don VE7DS, John 9M6XRO, Glenn KE4KY, and Dave K3EL

About the author:
Gene was first licensed in 1976 as WB5WFD, and has held K5GS since 1996. He's an avid DXer and an occasional contester. His DXCC count is 353 confirmed (Mixed) with all current DXCC entities confirmed. Gene's radio interest has always been DXing with occasional diversions into restoring vintage radios and the digital modes. Gene first visited Campbell Island in September, 1965 while serving aboard a US Navy weather ship supporting "Operation Deep Freeze". He made a total of 16 stops at the island during the years 1965 to 1967. Gene and his wife Pam live in Colorado and look forward to continuing their travels in retirement.

Thank you, Bill, W4UNP



Secretary-Treasurer Dick Williams (W3OA), President Gary Dixon (K4MQG), Retiring Secretary-Treasurer Bill Jennings (W4UNP) and Vice President John Scott (K8YC) all admire a crystal microphone presented to Bill for his thirty years service as INDEXA's Treasurer.

At a recent luncheon, Bill Jennings was presented with an engraved crystal microphone honoring Bill for serving as INDEXA's Treasurer since INDEXA's founding in 1983. While difficult to see in the above photo the microphone carries the INDEXA logotype and a suitable inscription honoring Bill's work. Bill will stay active as a knowledgeable member of the Board of Directors.